

Build a tall tower

Lesson at a glance

Open with Teddy too small to see over a low wall and the challenge to build him a tall tower that stands alone. Model a wobbly thin stack versus a wide base with card as a flat floor, then partners decide what belongs at the bottom. Pairs try a wide bottom first, then build taller with blocks, cups and card and gently seat Teddy on top. Close with show-and-tell of what helped each tower stand, then tidy.

Learning objectives

- Build a tower from blocks, cups and card that stands on its own
- Say one thing that helped the tower stand (for example a wide bottom)

Before the bell – prep

Day before: gather mixed blocks, about six paper cups and a few card offcuts per pair, plus one light soft toy each. Stage a starter set (large pieces + card) at each pair spot and full tubs closed beside them. Mark a low wall with tape or a shelf and clear floor lanes.

**Materials**

Item	Qty	Per	Source	Low-cost substitute
low wall, shelf edge or taped line for the teddy problem (plus masking tape if using a line)	1	class	classroom	a row of books on their sides, or a chalk line on the floor
building blocks (mixed sizes in a tub)	1	group	classroom	clean food cartons, small boxes or wooden offcuts stacked as blocks
paper cups	6	group	classroom	cardboard tubes from kitchen rolls
card offcuts	4	group	classroom	flattened cereal-box rectangles
light soft toy (for testing the tower)	1	group	classroom	a pair of clean socks rolled into a soft bundle
clear floor or low table build space	1	group	classroom	one shared carpet area with marked spots for pairs
class device or camera to photograph towers before tidy	1	class	classroom	teacher's phone used only by the teacher

Safety watch-point

Build on the floor or a low table; keep fingers clear between stacking pieces; stand back when a tower topples; sweep stray cups and card so nobody trips.



Teaching moves

- **Look at the problem:** Keep it to about three minutes. Hold up one soft toy and point to the wall you set up; do not tip out the build kit yet. Say Teddy wants to see over the wall and name what good looks like: tall, and it still stands when we let go.
- **Talk and share ideas:** On the carpet only, stack three small blocks so they wobble, then rebuild with four bigger blocks and a card floor so it stands. Think aloud that a wide bottom helps. Partner talk: big or little pieces on the bottom? Take two or three answers and revoice as wide bottom, strong feet or flat base.
- **Try a wide bottom:** Send pairs straight to starter sets already on the spots; keep full tubs closed. Watch for large pieces laid flat, card used as a floor, and words like steady or wobbly. After about four minutes ask who tried a wide bottom and invite two pairs to show their base only.
- **Build your tower:** Open the full tubs and run two short bursts with a 30-second freeze in the middle. Circulate asking where the wide bottom is and what is helping it stand. If pairs ignore card, show once laying it as a flat floor between layers. Gentle Teddy test only when the tower stands alone.
- **Show and tell:** Invite about four pairs; the rest give thumbs-up when they hear what helped. Model My tower stood because... and praise standing, fixing after a fall and clear noticing—not height alone. Photo each standing tower or best base for the unit folder before any pack-away.

What it should show

Most towers that stand will have larger pieces low down, often with card as a flat floor between layers. Children typically name wide bottom, big blocks at the bottom, careful stacking or card floor as what helped. A tower that keeps falling usually has a thin base or was pushed while building—pause, widen the bottom and try again. Falling is useful data, not failure.

Misconceptions & interventions

- **Taller is always better, even if the tower falls when we let go.** — Gently name both goals together: tall and standing by itself. Point to a fallen thin stack and a shorter steady base and ask which one Teddy could sit on safely.
- **Card is just another wall or decoration, so they stack it on edge and it wobbles.** — Show once for ten seconds: lay card flat on a cup or block layer like a floor, then stack on that flat surface. Ask does it feel steadier now?



Differentiation

- {'emerging': ['Stay at the teacher table with a partly-laid wide base already started; the child only adds the next layer and presses to feel steady.', 'Accept pointing or a wide-hand gesture for what helped if words are hard today.']}
- {'developing': ['After one standing tower, ask what they would change to make the bottom even wider, then try that fix in the second burst.']}
- {'proficient': ['Build a second tower with an even wider bottom, or test seating Teddy lower down if the top is tippy, and say which choice helped more.']}

Cross-curricular hook

Link to Aistear construction play and oral language: children rehearse the sentence starter My tower stood because... in the share circle.