The Brain: How Children Develop

Activities

You don't have to purchase an expensive sensory table to provide your child with hands-on learning. Here are some fun and inexpensive ways to expose your child to different textures and mediums.

Water sensory: During bath time, allow your child time to play with bath toys or household items such as cups and mixing spoons. Use descriptive words to talk about the properties of water such as wet, warm, cold, slippery, and so on. Play a game where you show your child an object and ask them if they think it will float or sink. Then place the object in the water and talk about the result.

You can also expose your child to water sensory experiences by allowing them to help you rinse and wash dishes, bathe the family pet, and water plants or your yard. When the weather is appropriate, your child can splash in puddles, play in the rain, swim in a pool, or run through the sprinklers.

Play dough: Children often enjoy the squishy, moldable qualities of play dough. Provide your child with cookie cutters, rolling pins, or other safe kitchen items to use with the play dough.

Finger paint: Provide your child with nontoxic finger paint and a smock or old shirt to protect their clothing. Allow them to paint paper or cardboard items such as empty cereal boxes and paper towel rolls.

Sand: You can use a shallow storage bin filled with sand as a small sand box. You can also use the lid to cover the sand and protect it from stray pets and rain. Provide a variety of cups, spoons, or shovels for your child to dig and pour with.

Dirt: Plant a garden with your young child. If you don't have the space for a garden, you can plant potted flowers or herbs.

Shaving cream or whipped cream: Lay wax paper on your table and dress your child in a smock or oversized shirt. Use shaving cream only if your child understands that it is not edible. Allow your child to squish the cream in their hands and draw pictures in it with their fingers.

Make your own sensory table: You may have seen the sensory tables provided in many preschools and day cares. Such tables are convenient, but they can be very expensive. You can provide your child with the same experience by using a much less expensive storage bin. The variety designed for use under a bed are often shallow and long—perfect for use as a sensory table. Place a waterproof tablecloth or a sheet under the bin to protect your floor and provide easy cleanup. You can then fill the bin with any of the following items:

- Dry rice or dry beans and cups, bowls, spoons, etc.
- Scrap paper and magazines with child-safe scissors for cutting practice.
- Sand, water, or any of the other items mentioned above.

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Dramatic play: Imaginative play is one of the best ways to promote cognitive growth in young children. Provide props to encourage dramatic play, such as clothes for dressing up, paper and writing utensils, toy phones, and so on. You can even choose a theme like "office" or "fire station." Read books about these places, take a family field trip to visit them, and then make a pretend setting out of a large cardboard box. Children often base their play off of activities they have seen or read about. This is why children love classic dramatic play such as "house" and "school."

Math: Incorporate mathematics into your day by counting the stairs as you climb or the cars as they drive by your window. Practice simple addition and subtraction by adding to or taking away from a small pile of blocks and counting the new total. Help your young child memorize his or her phone number and address. Point out your house number on mail and on your house.

Music: Music is a wonderful way to boost your child's cognition. Even very young babies respond to instrumental music and singing. Provide your child with age-appropriate music such as lullabies, silly songs, and instrumental music. Your child doesn't care what your singing voice is like, they just care that you are sharing something special with them.

Healthy touch: Touch is critical to your child's developing cognition. Healthy touch such as massage, snuggles, kisses, and hugs reduces stress in infants and young children. This healthy touch also creates connections in your child's rapidly developing brain.

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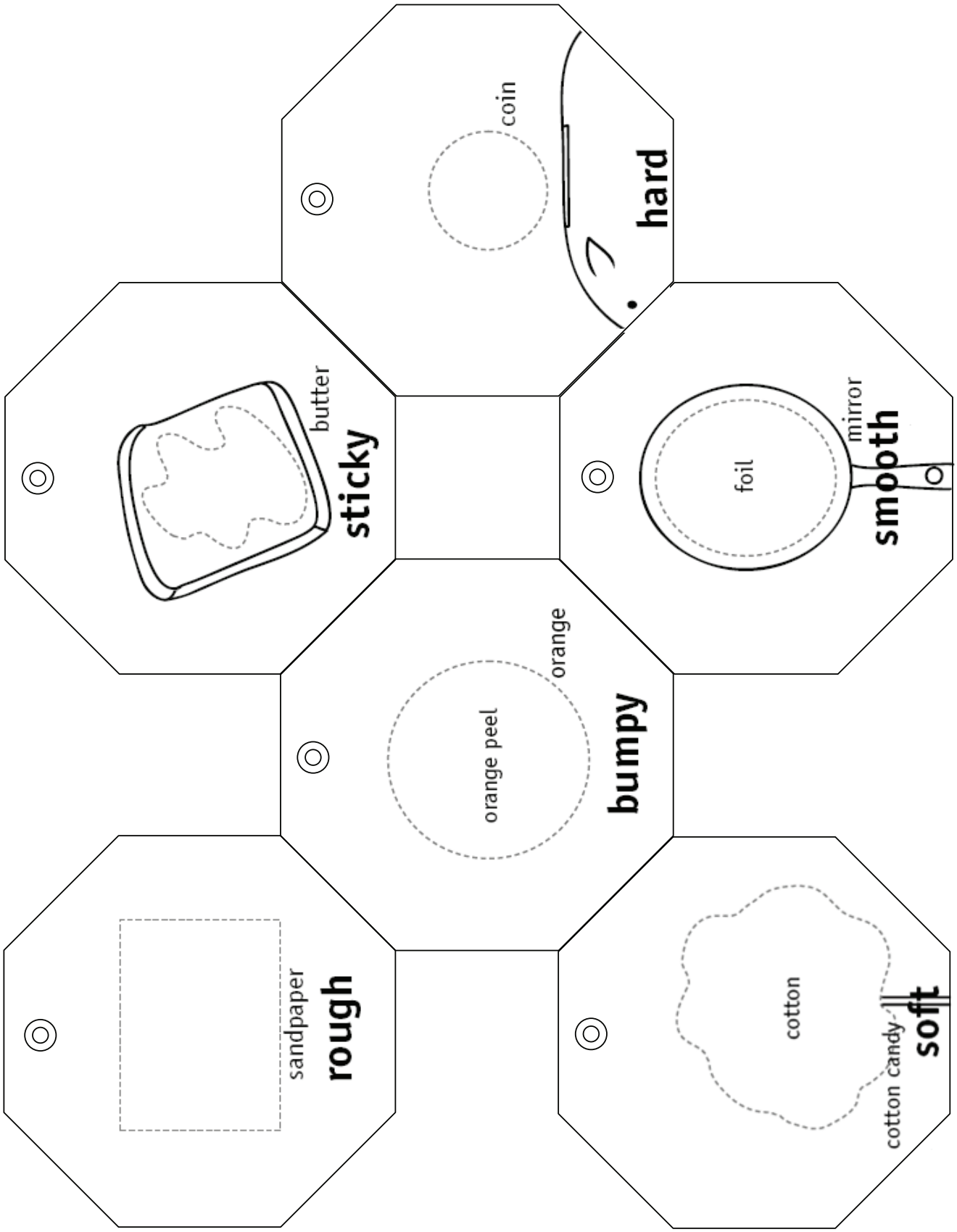
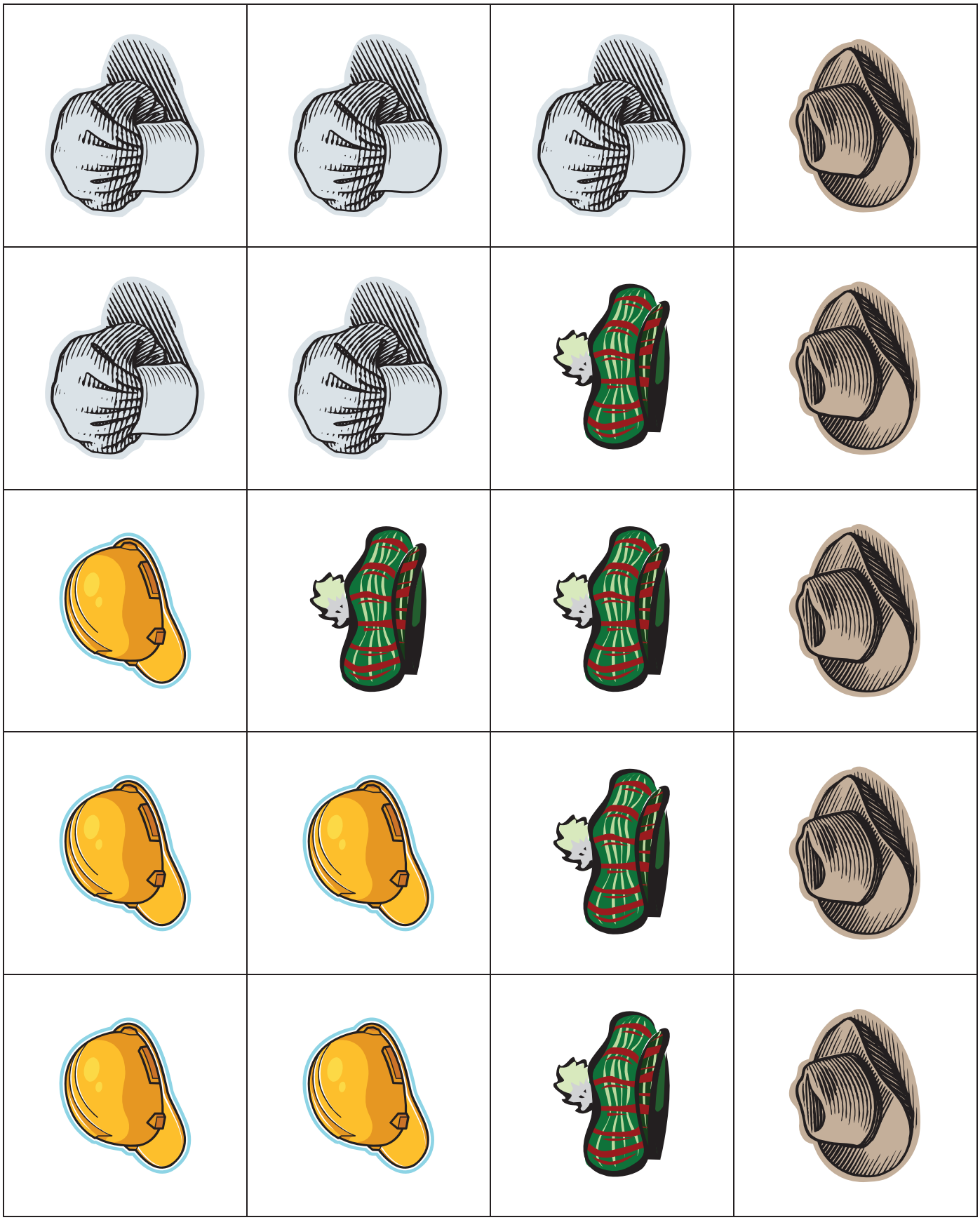
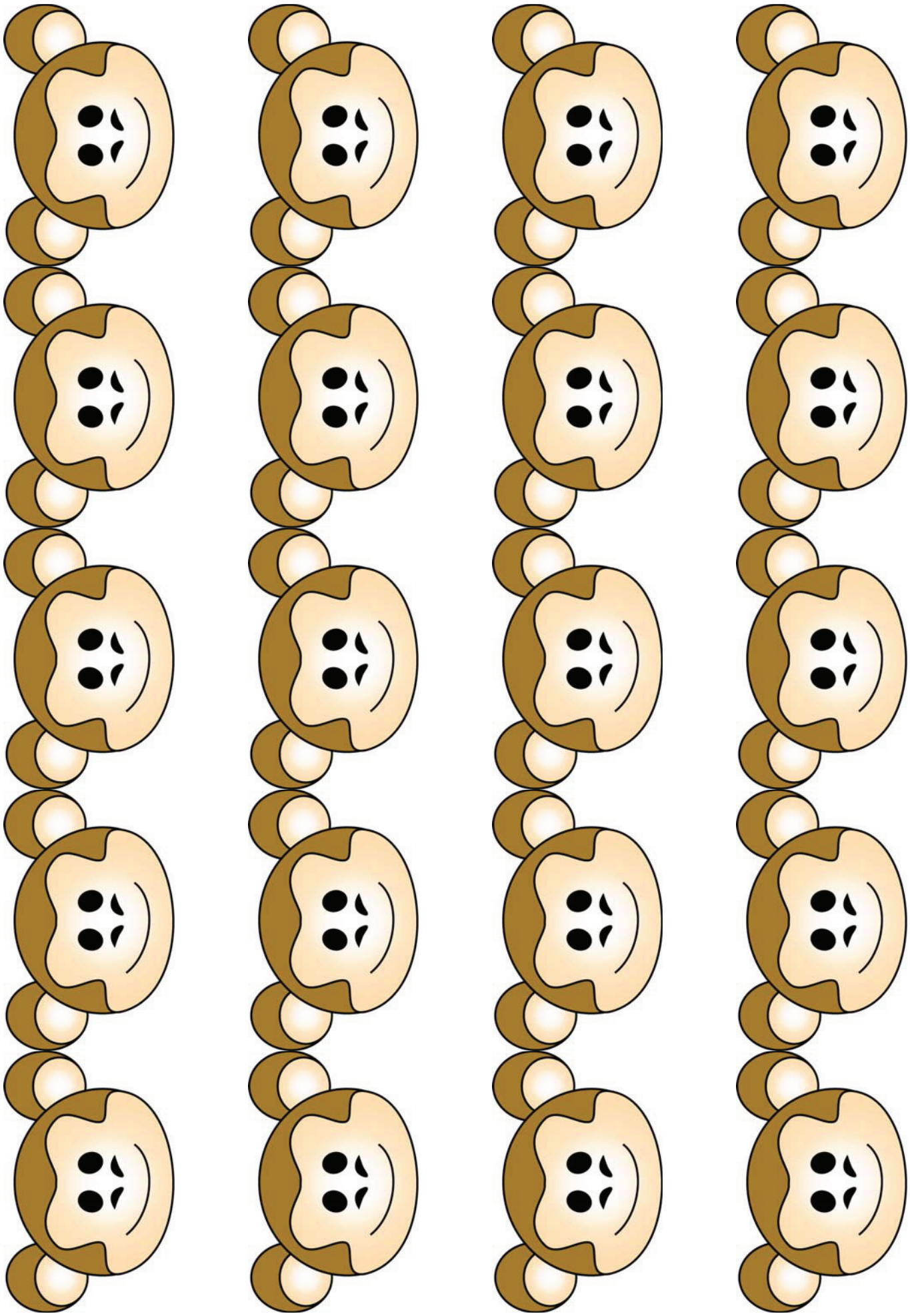
Texture Activity

Cut out the octagons and glue on the specified items. Let your child experience the different textures.



Sorting Activity

After reading *Caps for Sale* by Esphyr Slobodkina, cut out the hats and the monkeys. Let your child have fun placing the caps on the monkeys' heads, then sort the hats according to type.