

[Train Play with Old Tracks, New Tricks](#)

Trains and train tracks are a staple in many toddler and preschool classrooms, mine included. They are not only fun to play with, but they are also very helpful when we are dealing with [separation anxiety](#) or need something to [calm our environment](#). Recently our block area was transformed into **train play with [Old Tracks, New Tricks](#)**, a new book written by Jessica Petersen. We gathered all the wooden tracks we owned (we've had many considerate parents throughout the years who have donated what they no longer use) and our huge tub of Duplos (again, donated by many parents over the years). I watched as our preschoolers worked together to construct pillars and ramps, buildings and walls, all inspired by the book.



Full disclosure: I was provided a copy of [Old Tracks, New Tricks](#) for review. This post contains affiliate links for your convenience.

Train Play with Old Tracks, New Tricks

I introduced the book [Old Tracks, New Tricks](#) during our [morning meeting](#). As I read it to our preschoolers, I gave them plenty of time to absorb what they saw on each page. When we saw how bossy the trains were to the 3 new tracks, we paused to talk about feelings. How did it make the new tracks feel when they were treated that way? But then the new tracks decided not to let those trains bother them. Instead, they got creative. The other tracks got involved, and eventually the trains wanted to be part of the fun. We watched what happened

when the trains and the tracks had to work together and how they were rewarded with lots of fun. We compared it to how we work together on classroom activities.

Old Tracks, New Tricks Activity

I love getting the preschoolers involved in decisions. We knew we wanted to add trains to our block area after reading Old Tracks, New Tricks, but what would we put with them? We once again looked at the photos in the book and decided that we definitely needed Duplos. LOTS of Duplos.



We decided to pull our gigantic plastic tub of assorted Duplo pieces out of the storage closet and add it to our block area. We filled another basket with trains. We were eager to get to work!



The preschoolers began stacking the Duplos, figuring out which tracks would need support. A lot of collaboration happened while the bricks were moved around, especially once the tracks were involved.



“How can we raise the tracks?”

This was the first question that led to some pillars.



Some of the tracks were completely substituted with Duplos.

“The trains can still travel across them.”



Structures were also made alongside the tracks, as walls and buildings.



I love activities such as this because they encourage children to think of alternative ways to use materials. It's also a great way to revive old toys, putting them to new use.



More About the Book:

Old Tracks, New Tricks is written by Jessica Petersen, who blogs at [Play Trains](#), and published by [The Innovation Press](#). The rhyming text is fun to read as children predict the last words in each line. Jessica includes ideas to spiff up your wooden train tracks, such as with foil and even glow-in-the-dark materials for nighttime fun! The photos are bright and fun, showing off lots of different ways to customize your tracks. While writing the book, Jessica kept in mind all the stages of the train lover, from toddlers to preschoolers and older.

Want to see more? The Innovation Press has provided a [free preview of the first ten pages!](#)



More ideas for kids:



Fun Light Table Activities

The first time I saw a light table in a preschool classroom, I was drawn to the display on top of it. I knew I wanted one for our classroom! I immediately started searching for fun light table activities that would work well with young children. I never dreamed how many different fun light table activities existed!

If you have a light table, you know what I am talking about.

But, you might not have one. Yet. If it's because of the cost, there is good news! **You can make your own for a fraction of the cost.** As you scroll down this page, you will find a link.

We have ours tucked in our [reading and writing area](#) and it's a perfect spot for one or two children to explore color, as well as other concepts. We usually change what we have on our light table each week, so this allows for a nice variety. No matter what time of year, what season we are enjoying, there is a nice variety of activities that can be used at the light table. I've put together a collection of fun light table activities that our preschoolers have enjoyed in [our classroom](#).

How have your children enjoyed the light table? Please share in a comment!



This post contains affiliate links for your convenience.

Fun Light Table Activities

Today I'm sharing activities that we have done in our classroom, tested by many young children. Please note that the activities with small pieces should not be used by toddlers or for preschoolers that are still putting things in their mouths.

Exploring Nature



We placed our magnifying blocks on the light table along with pieces of greenery from outdoors.

Fitting Pieces Together



Many fit-together toys work well on the light table. While we prefer translucent, it doesn't necessarily need to be so.

Rainbow Stacker



When we first purchased this beautiful [rainbow stacker](#), we had no idea how fun it would be on the light table. They can

be used as houses, tunnels, and caves. Whatever the imagination wants!

Stacking Tree Blocks



[Tree blocks](#) are another item that can be used on different surfaces, including the light table. Pair them with loose parts and let the imagination have fun!

X-Rays



When we have our veterinarian unit set up in our [dramatic play](#) area, we put [animal X-rays](#) on our light table. Fun, right?

[Fine Motor Using Tongs](#)



We love using the light table for fine motor activities! All you need are some bottle caps and tongs for this hands-on activity!

Crystal Climbers



Our preschoolers love to make 3D construction while also exploring color with our [crystal climbers](#).

Tracing Cookie Cutters



Another use for cookie cutters! Place paper on top of light table and trace!

Color and Mirror Blocks



We've had our [color blocks](#) for years and they are adored by our toddlers and preschoolers! A few years ago we added [mirror blocks](#) for additional fun.

Scooping



Scooping loose parts is another fun fine motor activity that our preschoolers love.

Translucent Pipe Builders



These [translucent pipe builders](#) are fairly new to us and already we've found several different ways to explore with them. In addition to the light table, we've also used them at the [water table](#). They make great telescopes, too!

Leaves



Every fall we ask our preschoolers to bring in a leaf they found at home or on a walk with family. When they bring them to school, we place them on the light table for more exploration.

Valentine's Day



Once again, it's all about loose parts! We gathered various hearts for this festive activity!

Magna Tiles



If we could only have a few toys in our classroom, [magna tiles](#) would be one of them. While they aren't limited to the light table, adding a lit surface makes them that much more exciting! Toddlers and preschoolers will explore color and shapes as well as constructing 3D structures.

[Plastic Eggs](#)



Save those plastic eggs after easter! We how they look on top of light.

Letter Stones



Exploring the alphabet on the light table adds some letter recognition. We not only use these letter stones, but also [magnetic letters](#) and [foam letters](#).

Stencils



Similar to using cookie cutters and a bit easier for smaller hands to hold.

Studying Bugs



In the spring we will study [bugs](#) at the light table. Adding a resource book is helpful, too!

Shapes



Exploring shapes and color is always fun on the light table, but these [geometric solids](#) allow us to do so in 3D.

Shells



Have you ever placed shells on top of a light table? The textures are much more apparent. This makes an inviting place

to explore!

Matching Colors



We get a lot of use out of our acrylic boxes! In this activity we matched them with colored feathers.

Loose Parts for Winter



We created a winter scene on our light table using doilies and loose parts.

Color Study



We focus on a specific color each month, and often will showcase it on our light table.

Wedgits



[Wedgits](#) are right up there with Magnatiles when it comes to popularity. They nest, stack, link and wedge together!

Christmas Fine Motor



I picked up this tree and stocking from the dollar store, knowing it would be fun on the light table with matching bells and colored window blocks.

Bears



Setting up a small world on the light table is popular, too. We played with our bear family during bear week.

Tinker Toys



This classic toy will always be loved by children! We use [Tinker Toys](#) during centers time and also for some small group activities. But they are also fun at the light table!

Gears



[Gears](#) are a fun challenge on and off the light table. Our preschoolers figure out how they work by keeping them vertical or working with them horizontally.

Letters



Another way to add literacy to your light table is with this [letter construction kit](#). Since they are translucent, they are even more fun on the light table!

Want to make your own light table?
Allison from No Time for Flashcards
shares an easy tutorial [on her blog](#).



Fun Block Activities for Toddlers and Preschoolers

Our block area is one of our most popular [centers](#) in our toddler and preschool classrooms. The children love to use their imaginations as they construct buildings, homes, airplanes, robots ... anything their minds think of. Are you wondering about **fun block activities for toddlers and preschoolers**? Let me share our favorite ways we used ours this year, as well as the benefits.



This post contains affiliate links for your convenience.

Fun Block Activities for Toddlers and Preschoolers

Unit Blocks



If we could only have one type of blocks, it would be unit blocks. They provide the foundation for basic math and geometry with the various shapes involved. Children need to think about balance as they stack the blocks, and this also strengthens hand-eye coordination. We keep ours on a block cart that has specific shelves and cubbies for each type of block. As we put the blocks away, we need to sort them before

placing them in the correct area of the cart.

Arches Blocks



After having our unit blocks for awhile, we decided to add some arches blocks. Our toddlers and preschoolers love building bridges and tunnels. They've even been turned on their sides to create round stables for horses. We work on prepositional words as we place items under, over, behind, in front, and inside.

Plastic Jumbo Building Blocks



These jumbo building blocks have been a favorite for years! The interlocking pieces make them easy to stack. Our older preschoolers have enjoyed making patterns with them as well.

Big Waffle Blocks



Another favorite that we've had for years! These large waffle blocks are adored by our toddlers and preschoolers. We use these in our large activity room and in the gym, where we have more space.

Rainbow Window Blocks



We initially bought these rainbow window blocks for our [light table](#), but they are now also loved in the block area. The hardwood frames are easy for small hands to hold. Using these blocks strengthens hand-eye coordination, visual perception, and color recognition.

[Rainbow Stacker](#)



This rainbow stacker is one of our newer pieces. I wish we got it long ago because our toddlers and preschoolers love it that much. These are beautifully handcrafted! We originally purchased them for our [rainbow](#) unit, but realized they are a perfect addition to our block area year round. We've also used them on our light table and our science table.

[Translucent Blocks](#)



Block play is fun on the light table! There are 6 different shapes and 6 colors to explore. Our preschoolers love to see how tall they can stack the cubes. A great activity for working on simple counting skills and color recognition.

Colored Foam Squares



I found this set at the dollar store. We use them for counting activities during our [small groups](#). We also stack them, counting as we do so.

Giant Cardboard Blocks



This is our newest set of blocks, compliments of [Edo](#). They

sent us a kit to try and our preschoolers loved them! After assembling the blocks, I brought them to school where the children stacked and then decorated them. This is what they loved most – that they were allowed to draw on them and add stickers. They can be purchased as part of their [kickstarter program](#).



What are your favorite ways to play with blocks?



More activities for preschoolers:



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Making Roadways with Wallpaper Samples



Making roadways with wallpaper samples was a last-minute idea I had when setting up our block area. I was cutting out rectangles from a book of textured wallpaper samples to use as play dough mats. As with many of my ideas, suddenly I looked over at the [block](#) area and wondered what would happen if I set out some strips of wallpaper. Would they use them as roadways? *This post contains affiliate links.*

I invited the [preschoolers](#) over to this area by setting up a few of the roadways, leaving the rest in baskets.



They got right to work, laying out the rest of the strips to lengthen their roads.



Then they ran out of paper roads and wanted more.



I decided to bring the book of wallpaper samples to the block corner along with a container of scissors.



We all started cutting strips of wallpaper for roads!



The [teacher](#) in me was delighted to see such fun AND fine motor practice, especially from those who normally were not interested in using scissors.



We reused those roads for many weeks before they got a bit too crumpled. However, we can easily make more!

Available from [Amazon](#):



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