

Praying Mantis Anatomy

Insects are fascinating creatures, but they're awfully small and difficult to see, not to mention a little nerve-racking for some parents. This art-project-turned-anatomy-lesson will give your child a larger than life model for scientific scrutiny, right down to the movable legs!

Your little entomologist will develop a healthy curiosity while doing research and finding a good template for her puppet, work on her fine motor skills while cutting out the puppet parts and fastening them together, and learn about the differences between insect and human bodies all the while! During play, she'll synthesize her imagination and newly-acquired facts, an essential critical thinking skill that will allow her to learn and play more thoughtfully. Additional activities included below will make this puppet a generous playmate and teacher!



What You Need:

- Picture of a mantis
- Copy machine
- Marker(s)
- Stiff plastic, cardboard, or art foam
- Scissors
- Brass paper fasteners
- Tape or binder paper hole reinforcers
- Googly eyes (optional)
- Popsicle stick (optional)

What You Do:

1. With your child, find a picture of a mantis that clearly shows the head, body, and legs.
2. Enlarge the drawing on a copy machine so that the puppet will be larger than a real mantis. This will make it easier to see and to handle.
3. Trace the mantis head and body onto stiff plastic, cardboard, or art foam. Then trace each leg separately. You can use multiple tracings of a leg if the other leg is obscured or hard to cut out in the original picture.
4. Your child can use colored materials (like the art foam) or markers to color in the traced mantis parts, using the original picture as a guide. Add googly eyes for extra personality!
5. Cut out the body/head piece and all six leg pieces.
6. With tape or hole reinforcers, reinforce the legs and body where you'll be attaching them. You can use this opportunity to ask your child where the legs should go.
7. Hinge it at the joints with brass paper fasteners. Include all six legs even though it's a flat puppet. If you feel like that's too many legs or too many fasteners, try using one fastener to hold two legs (one for each side of the body) onto the puppet.
8. The puppet is ready for play as-is or with a popsicle stick taped to the back to make a handle.

Introduce your child to her new friend! Have him say "Hi, my name is Mantis. What's your name?" Don't forget to make his legs move! Find more great ideas for mantis learning activities on the next page.

Learning From Your Mantis:

- Ask your child to count the legs on the mantis puppet (there should be six) and to count her own

- legs. What's different about the mantis' front legs and back legs? What are the front legs used for?
- Make the mantis puppet catch an "insect" (your own hand, then your child's hand if she's willing). As long as your child knows that she's safe, being "chased" by the mantis puppet can be a lot of fun.
 - What other parts of the insect can your child name? Introduce vocabulary such as "thorax," "abdomen," "antenna," and "palps." You can even sing this song to the tune of "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes":

Head, thorax, ab-do-men, abdomen. (The insect's thorax is the part where the limbs are attached—point to your chest. The insect's abdomen is the part after the legs are attached—point to your bottom.)

Head, thorax, ab-do-men, abdomen.

Eyes, antenna, and mouth and palps, (Point to your mouth, then make your index fingers into tiny arms at your mouth to be the palps, which are mouth parts.)

Head, thorax, ab-do-men, abdomen.

Of course, you're not limited to these activities. Have fun with it!

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