

Make Plastic Bottle Boats!

Delight your child by helping them to construct a boat that can hold two seaworthy toy figures in this engaging project made from upcycled water bottles. In this imaginative activity, children bring the fun of a day by the water to their own bathtub, kitchen sink, or wading pool — all by bringing new life to everyday items that would otherwise be thrown away or recycled. Children will also work on their fine motor and design thinking skills as they assemble this fun floating catamaran.

What You Need:

- Two water or soda bottles with caps
- Black permanent marker
- Colored permanent markers (optional)
- Craft knife
- Scissors
- Electrical tape
- Small waterproof, lightweight toy figures

What You Do:

1. Begin by having your child decorate the water bottles with colored permanent markers. These decorations may include pictures or details that make the bottles look like a real boat; your child may also wish to leave the bottles undecorated. Make sure that you or your child holds the bottles in a way that will not spread the undried permanent marker onto their hands, their clothing, or the furniture.
2. Have your child use the black marker to outline the area that you will cut out. This should be approximately 2" x 5" on one side of the bottle. Have your child make sure that their toy figures fit into this opening; you can adjust slightly if needed.
3. Now it's time to cut the bottle. Because this step requires sharp scissors that tend to slip across the bottle, an adult should take over. To keep the bottles as stable as possible while cutting them, remove their caps and hold the bottles firmly in place on a cutting board; use a craft knife to punch a hole through the center of the area you will cut out. Insert the scissors into this hole and make your larger cut. Don't forget to replace the caps, or the boat will sink!
4. Have your child tape the two bottles together side by side using electrical tape. Your child can run one strip around the bases of the two bottles and another strip closer to the top.
5. As you work, discuss the concept of reusing and recycling with your child. How can we use fewer disposable items, or recycle or repurpose the ones we do use? Can your child think of other everyday items that could be given a second life as toys or tools?
6. Double-check that the toy figures your child has selected are waterproof, just in case the boat should capsize! Have your child place them in the boat, one in each bottle.
7. Help your child fill a basin, pool, or the bathtub several inches deep. Now it's time to have some fun!
8. As you launch your newly constructed boat, ask your child to reflect on what they are observing. Why do boats float? What makes one boat float better than another? What happens when your child adds lighter or heavier toys or other objects to the boat? This can be a good opportunity to introduce new vocabulary words and concepts like buoyancy, weight, and volume.

