

## The Blueberry Machine

### Activities for Home and School



The following activities are based on the photographic and writing techniques used in *The Blueberry Machine* and can be used at home or at school to encourage learning in the areas of social development and communication; listening, reading, and writing; visual observation; mechanics and mathematics; and visual art. The activities invite children and adults to explore together and invent new creations from the ordinary objects in their surroundings.

When facilitating these activities, please be sensitive to the amount of time a child needs to look and listen. Time, repetition, and the freedom to experiment are necessary for learning.

The target age groups are only suggestions. The techniques are challenging at every developmental level. It is never too early for the youngest child to begin by looking, listening, pointing in response to questions, and collecting and manipulating objects. It is also never too late to participate, for creative activities challenge us in ways that keep the most skillful inventor, engineer, artist, or writer busy for a lifetime.

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The Blueberry Machine

Jan von Holleben (photography)

Monte Packham (verse)

Publisher: Little Steidl

Publication date: 2022

ISBN 978-3-944630-05-2

Printed in Germany at Little Steidl

35€ / \$35

Where to buy this book: [www.steidl.de](http://www.steidl.de)

Free international shipping

#### Activities for beginners: 2-6 years

Looking at the pictures and making connections to the world around us

Finding objects in the neighborhood and among family and friends

Talking about objects and sorting them into groups

Looking at the machines around us and making our own

Reading, writing, and rhyming for beginners

#### Discover other artists and machines: all ages

#### Activities for older children: 7-10 years

Finding and gathering objects

Rhyming and rhythm in *The Blueberry Machine*

Making machines

Writing about your machine in verse

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*left: Jan von Holleben's studio in Berlin, shown during the making of The Blueberry Machine. The camera is mounted above the work table.*

Each picture in *The Blueberry Machine* was made with common objects that were arranged on a photograph. The photograph and objects were then rephotographed from above to create the final picture. The artist Jan von Holleben has a whole studio filled with all kinds of objects and materials that he uses in his work. He is always on the lookout for an interesting shape, color, or texture that he can turn into something extraordinary.

Monte Packham wrote the story of *The Blueberry Machine* in response to Jan von Holleben's pictures. It took eight years! He looked very closely at each image and each machine. He imagined who his character Olav would be – his personality, interests, joys, and dreams. He imagined Olav's family. He imagined the story of how all of this happened and why. But he also had to find the right words to express the story that he imagined. The text did not always rhyme, for example. This idea came very late in the process. The rhyming is a way of expressing the creativity of Olav's machines by turning language into patterns and rhythms. The words play together like the parts of Olav's machines.

It looks and sounds like a lot of fun, and it is! The good news is that all of this can be done at home or at school with imagination and common objects. The great news is that it's more than just fun. Each of the steps involved in this kind of work – from collecting, to sorting, to planning and designing, to building, to photographing, to story telling and word play – are wonderful ways for children (and their adults) to develop a broad range of skills.



*above: illustrations in progress, shot from a lower vantage point to show how the objects sit on top of the photographs.*

Many objects in the pictures can be found at home and in the classroom. Encourage the child to find as many as possible and provide hints and help when needed. Be sure to create opportunities to use and talk about these objects each day to reinforce learning and vocabulary. As your child gains experience talking about and using objects, look again at Olav's machines. Ask: What do you think this part of the machine does? Draw connections to the child's experiences.

Sample questions, responses, and extensions

With children who are not yet speaking, focus on looking, listening, and pointing:

Do you see something in the picture? Can you point to it with your finger?

Response: That's a white button.

Extension: Is there another button in the picture? Can you point to it? Can we find some other buttons on our clothes?

Continue to name and describe the objects as your child points.

Response: That's a spoon.

Extension: We found the spoon in the picture. Can we find other spoons in the house? Let's look in the kitchen.

I see a red block (a yellow button, a blue propeller, a screw, a key, etc). Can you find it in the picture?

Can you find a circle in the picture? Are there more circles in the picture?

Can you find something that is yellow? What else is yellow in the picture?

With older children, focus on looking, listening, pointing, and speaking:

What things do you see in the picture?

Which things are circles (squares, balls, blocks, tubes)? Which things are red (blue, yellow, brown, black, orange, etc.)?

Which things in the picture have you never seen before?

Response: That's a funnel (a battery, a role of tape, a mixer, etc.).

Extension: I think we might have a funnel in the kitchen (in the drawer, on the shelf, in the garage, in the garden, etc.). Let's find it.

Extension: What can we do with this funnel? Can we pour something through it? Let's see what will go through the funnel. Can we find something that gets stuck and doesn't go through? How does this funnel fit together with other things in the kitchen? Can we use it to pour water into something big like a bowl? Can we use it to pour water into something small like a bottle? If we didn't have this funnel to help us, could we still pour the water into the bottle? Let's try and see. What's different when we use the funnel?

Extension: We have figured out how a funnel works. Now let's look at a tube. Can we also put something through the tube? Are there other things in the kitchen that we can pour things through (colanders, sieves, sifters, straws, tea strainers, tea pots, tubular pasta)? Is something the same when it comes out? Or does it change? Do some things get stuck when we try to put them through?

Extension: Let's look back at the pictures in *The Blueberry Machine*. Do you see the tubes and straws? When we put something into our tube, it came out the other end. What do you think the tube does in Olav's machine? What do you think goes through the straw?

## Finding objects in the neighborhood and among family and friends

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Supplies: shoe boxes or other small containers for storing gathered objects. Start with one, and when it is full, move on to a second. The containers should be small enough for the child to handle and move around. A small paper lunch bag can also work well.

### Searching at the playground

It can be a lot of fun to search for things that are hiding or that have been lost or left behind. The community playground is a great place to look for these hidden treasures. Be sure to take a small box or bag to collect things. Each time you go to the playground, your child can search and add to the collection. Provide oversight to avoid contact with potentially harmful objects.

### Questions and extensions

What can we find at the playground? Buttons, beads, marbles, string, parts of toys, coins, stones and pebbles, necklaces and rings?

Are there interesting small twigs, sticks, seeds, leaves, and pods that have dropped from the trees and other plants?

Imagination game: Take turns with friends and family imagining the story of how an object got to the place where it was found. The goal is to imagine as many details as possible about the object. Each person playing the game can contribute ideas to the story.

### Searching among family and friends

Is there someone who likes to make or repair things in the family or in the neighborhood? Often there will be some leftover bits and pieces that can be collected and used: bolts and screws, hinges, hardware, paper clips, spools of thread, bits of yarn, pieces of cloth, colorful paper, whole spices, seeds, beans, noodles, empty containers and tubes.

Make a list together of the friends and family members who might have interesting things to add to the child's collection. Ask if you may visit with your child to find

out more about what the person likes to make or repair. Explain in advance that your child is putting together a collection of interesting small objects that are left over and no longer needed. Let the person know that your child would like to ask questions about the materials, objects, and tools that are used in the activity. This will give the person a chance to think about how to explain and demonstrate in a simple way.

The visit is an opportunity not only to gather objects but also to gather information about the objects. Be an example for your child and ask questions during your visit. Listen carefully to the answers and leave enough time for your child to join in the discussion. Encourage your child to ask questions: What do you do with this thing? What's it called? Where did it come from? What do you like about it? These are simple questions that your child will already be exploring in other activities. Remember to take your copy of *The Blueberry Machine* to share during your visit.

## Talking about objects and sorting them into groups

1

This activity builds on the previous activity “finding objects in the neighborhood and among family and friends.” Spread out the collection of found objects on a table or on the floor. Play with grouping the objects in different ways.

Questions:

What are the colors of the things you found? The youngest child can point and then listen to your response.

Can you find all of the red (green, blue, brown, grey, yellow, orange, purple, pink, black, white, etc.) things and put them together in a group?

Are there things that have more than one color? Make a group of these things.

What things do you have that are circles and balls? Make a group of these things.

What things do you have that roll? Make a group of these things.

What things do you have that bounce when you drop them? Make a group of these things.

Are there things that have letters or numbers on them? Make a group of these things.

Can you arrange your objects from smallest to largest?

What are your objects made from? Are there things made of wood? Glass? Plastic? Metal? Are there things that come from plants? Are some things made of paper, or cloth? How many different materials can you find? Make groups of each material.

Do any of your things make sounds? Which make a loud sound? Which make quiet sounds? Put these into groups.

Can you find things in your collection that are smooth, rough, prickly, soft, fuzzy? Put them into groups.

Part 1: Finding and investigating machines

A machine is something that does something. It helps us to do things that we don't want to do or can't do ourselves. There are many machines around us: bicycles, cars, washing machines and laundry driers, sewing machines, pencil sharpeners, music boxes, wind-up toys, vacuum cleaners, electric mixers, spice grinders, coffee machines, elevators, street cleaners and garbage trucks, cranes, leaf blowers and lawn mowers, helicopters and airplanes, windmills, and tractors. There might be a factory in the neighborhood where you can find very complex machines.

Choose a room where machines can be found and used. The kitchen is a good place to start. A storage closet, work room, workshop, or garage might also be a good place to look. When you find a machine, take it to a comfortable place where you can look at it carefully and discuss it.

For children who show a deep interest in machines and would like to have something to take apart and put back together, Good Will and garage sales are wonderful places to find inexpensive old machines. You might know someone who has a broken machine that they are planning to throw away or take to recycling.

Question: What machines can we find together in the kitchen?

When you find a machine, talk about what it does. Use the machine together or show your child how it works. The child can watch or help. Some parents or teachers might build or repair machines as a profession or hobby. If so, you can open up the machine and look at what's inside. Parents with less mechanical knowledge can find a simple, hand-operated machine like a pencil sharpener or a spice grinder to take apart and explore with the child. Look at and discuss the different parts of the machine.

Questions:

Is there a handle to turn? Is there a switch to turn it on? Does the machine have a cord to plug in?

Are there parts that you can take off and put back on? Look at how the parts fit together.

Does the machine have parts that move? What shapes are the parts that move?

Are there any tubes, pipes, or hoses? What goes through them?

Is the machine broken? What part doesn't work?

Look again at the machines in *The Blueberry Machine*. Take time to discuss together what each of Olav's machines does. Choose one or two machines to discuss each day and be sure to look carefully.

Questions:

Are some of Olav's machines made for pleasure and enjoyment?

Is it interesting to watch or listen to a machine?

What do you think the word "elation" means? Listen for the word "elation" as you listen to the story. What do the pictures tell us the word means?

Part 2: Making a machine

Set up: The machine will be made with the child's collection of objects (see the previous activity "finding objects in the neighborhood and among family and friends"). Help your child to find a flat, hard floor area or table top for working. You will need an area of about 11 x 16 inches for the machine and enough additional space to spread out the objects. If the child's work will need to be moved during the work process, put something stiff and stable under the work so that it can be lifted and moved. This can be a sheet of paperboard or cardboard, a cookie sheet, a cutting board from the kitchen. Anything will do as long as it can be moved with ease and without disturbing the child's work.

Questions:

What will your machine do?

Where would your machine be used? What kind of place?

In *The Blueberry Machine*, the machines are made by arranging objects on photographs. You might already have a photograph of a place that the child can use as a background. If you have a camera and a way to print out a photograph, the child can make a background photograph. If you do not have a camera or a way to print out a photograph, no worries. You can find an interesting photograph. Used book stores, secondhand shops, and garage sales are good places to look for photographs, and it can be fun to search for just the right thing. It is also possible to draw a place or make a collage that can be used as a background for the machine. It will also work to make the machine right on a table or floor without a background. If you have a camera, you can take a picture of the finished machine from above.

Questions to ask during and after the work process:

How does your machine work? What are the different parts of your machine and what do they do?

Does your machine move from one place to another like a car or a bicycle? What part helps it to move?

Does something go into the machine and come out again? Where does it go in and how does it travel through? Will it be different when it comes out? What will change?

Does your machine solve problems?

There are machines that make machines. For example, cars are made in a factory with people and machines working together to make what neither can do alone.

Questions:

Who makes the machines that make the machines?

Who made your machine? Are you also a machine?

Did you find the blueberry machine in the book? Let's read it again and find the blueberry machine.

### Listening for Rhyming Words

Read aloud a paragraph, or stanza, of *The Blueberry Machine* for your child. Read slowly and clearly. Stop at the end of the stanza to discuss what your child heard.

Question: Did you hear words that rhyme (or sound alike)? Listen again. Give an example of some rhyming words that you hear, and ask your child to listen for others.

Repeat the stanza as many times as your child would like to hear it. Go slowly and give your child enough time. Stop when your child becomes tired or distracted. If your child becomes tired but is determined to continue, provide a opportunity to simply relax and listen while you read the rest of the story aloud. Choose a different stanza each day and concentrate on finding the rhyming words.

### Looking for Rhyming Words

When your child can hear the rhyming words in the text with ease, move on to finding the rhyming words on the page. Show your child how to follow the text with a finger as you read aloud. Choose one stanza and help to move your child's finger in time with your reading. Repeat and allow time for your child to make visual and kinesthetic connections between what is seen and what is heard.

Questions:

Do you hear the words that rhyme? Which words rhyme?

Can you find the words that rhyme as you follow along with your finger?

Where do you find the rhyming words? Are they at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of the line?

Would you like to hear it again?

Over several days, look at different pages, each time providing opportunities to listen and follow along to find the words that rhyme. Move on to a new stanza

when your child is ready. Stop when your child is tired. Sometimes a child becomes tired or overwhelmed but would still like to continue. Let the child rest and listen for pleasure while you continue to read aloud.

When your child can hear and find the rhyming words easily, you can read together. Read aloud while your child follows along with a finger. Pause at the end of each line and encourage your child to read the rhyming words aloud and finish each line.

#### Looking for Patterns and Surprises in Rhyming Words

Ask your child to choose a favorite part of the story. Read aloud as your child listens again to hear the rhyming words.

#### Questions:

Can you find the rhyming words with your finger? Repeat the passage as needed.

Let's look at the words that rhyme. Do you see any similarities? What parts of each word look similar?

If you don't see a similarity, that's not a problem. Move on to the next set of rhyming words and see if there are any similarities.

Working together through the book, compare the rhyming words and share your observations. Sometimes words that rhyme are written with the same letter combinations, but sometimes the way a word is written is more of a surprise. The rhyming words in *The Blueberry Machine* are good examples of both patterns and surprises.

It's important for an emerging reader to feel comfortable with different ways of decoding and figuring out words. When the rhyming words do not follow a pattern, you can encourage your child to look carefully and make a personal connection with the written word.

Examining how a word looks can be both helpful and exciting. *The Blueberry Machine* uses a beautiful typeface that was developed for emerging and dyslexic

readers. It is visually interesting and has many special details that reward careful looking. The size of the letterforms, the spacing of the type, and the color and texture of the paper surface have been carefully designed to make the type easily readable and visually enjoyable.

Questions:

Those rhyming words also look very different to me. Is there something else about the word that can help us to find it and read it?

Is there a special letter that you like in this word?

Is the word long or short?

Is there a part of the word that makes sense to you? Is there a part that is trickier to read?

Sometimes the spellings of words can be changed in a playful way. There are two lines in the book in which this happens. Can you find them? These words would rhyme even if spelled correctly, but the author has found a way to spell the words so that they also look alike.

## Discover other artists and machines

1/2

Artists and inventors have a lot in common. Sometimes it's hard to say if a machine is art or science. Often it is both! Just like some of Olav's machines, many of these art works were made for the pure joy of watching and listening.

Artist: Jean Tinguely

Music machine, Museum Tinguely, Basel, Switzerland:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Xp2jjSaRVg>

Fountain, Theaterplatz, Basel, Switzerland:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVfZt6Gzk7E>

Fountain in winter, Theaterplatz, Basel, Switzerland:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NhRAzHGMLcA>

Stravinsky Fountain (with artist Niki de Saint Phalle), Paris, France:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YW2lqo65Krg>

Artist: Arthur Ganson

*Machine with 23 Scraps of Paper:*

<https://highlike.org/video/arthur-ganson/>

*Machine with Artichoke Petal #1:*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=skel3FXz9\\_4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=skel3FXz9_4)

*Machine with Wishbone:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4pZXoayEL78>

*Machine with Roller Chain:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tcw7lvGJG9s>

Artist/Composer: Studio Zimoun

Multiple works in various locations:

<https://www.zimoun.net>

## Discover other artists and machines

2/2

Artist/Engineer: Theo Jansen

Strandbeests (Beach Creatures):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C97kMKwZ2-g>

For older children / discussion:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ePeBNJuKCQ>

Website:

[www.strandbeest.com](http://www.strandbeest.com)

Multiple artists and inventors

Collection of 15 machine works:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7o9OL\\_y71W0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7o9OL_y71W0)