

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)

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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.

Finding and gathering objects

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Supplies: shoe boxes, small containers, or bags to collect objects

There are many places in the community to collect interesting things that can be used to make a machine. Searching for objects is a way of making connections with others and learning about their work, interests, and talents. Start with family and friends and then broaden the search to include people in the community who make and repair things. Let your child take the lead when possible. Your role will be to ask questions and help to make connections with family, friends, and community members when needed.

The goal of this activity is to gather many different kinds of small objects – different shapes, colors, textures, materials. It is also an opportunity to develop listening and communication skills and to learn about each object's story: What is it used for? Where did it come from? What else can it do?

Making a list of people and setting up visits

Questions:

Do you know someone who makes or repairs things?

Is there someone in the family or in the neighborhood who likes to cook, sew, knit, make art work, build with wood, repair things around the house, fix the car or the bicycles?

Is there a shop or business in the community where things are made or repaired?

Often people who make and repair things will have leftover parts and 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, family, and community members who might have interesting things to add to your child's collection. Ask if you can visit with your child to find out more about what the person makes or repairs. Explain in

Finding and gathering objects

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advance that your child is putting together a collection of interesting small objects that are left over or no longer needed and that these will be used for a project. 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 way that will be accessible to a child.

Your child might want to take the initiative to set up the visit and provide background information about the project. Let your child take the lead if this is desired, and you can help to make sure all of the details of the visit are clear.

Preparing for your visit

Before the visit, encourage your child to find out about what your friend or family member makes or repairs. Go with your child to your local public library and talk to your librarian, who will help you find books. Even books written for adults can have interesting and helpful pictures. You can also look online; however, printed books are a better source of high-quality visual information and engage the child more fully through touch, movement, sight, and interaction. It is also a good learning experience for your child to interact with the librarian and explain what he or she would like to research.

Encourage or help your child to make a list of questions to ask during the visit. Take the list with you to the visit.

Support your child's research by asking questions:

What kinds of tools and materials do you think you might see during your visit? Do you have questions about how to use those tools? Do you have questions about how the materials feel? Would you like to know where the materials come from?

Does your friend or family member work with or repair machines? What do some of these machines look like? Do you have questions about the different parts or how the parts work together?

At the visit

Be sure to take *The Blueberry Machine* with you so that your child can show the friend or family member what will be made with the collection of objects.

Children have different comfort levels and abilities with communication. Whether your child is shy or outgoing, you should model good listening skills for your child and demonstrate through your actions that you are careful and respectful of the things around you. An outgoing child can take the lead in asking questions. You can support a shy child by helping to ask questions. Be sure to leave plenty of time for your child to get up the courage to join in once the conversation gets started. Children benefit from listening to conversation and sometimes need extra time to join in. Be sure to pause before you ask a question and give your child many chances to join in. Even if your child chooses only to look and listen, this is a wonderful learning experience.

Rhyming and rhythm in *The Blueberry Machine*

1/3

The Blueberry Machine is written in verse, which means that the lines have a rhythm and a beat. Verse is a musical way of using language. The way it sounds is as important as what it means.

The Blueberry Machine is written in rhyming couplets, which means that every pair of two lines rhymes. For your own preparation as the parent or teacher, take a few minutes to read the text and find the rhyming couplets. You will need to be aware of the pattern; however, the goal of this activity is for the child to figure out the pattern through investigation. You will only ask questions. Let your child figure out the answers. Give as much time as needed.

Finding the rhyming pattern

Read the story aloud and ask your child to listen for the rhyming words as you read. Go back to the beginning and focus on one paragraph, or stanza, at a time.

Questions:

Did you hear words that rhyme? Which words rhyme?

Now look at the text as you listen. Where do you find the rhyming words in each line? Are they at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of the lines?

Can you find a pattern in the way the lines rhyme?

Do all the lines in a section rhyme with each other?

Do only certain lines rhyme with other lines?

Making a diagram of the rhyming pattern

Your child might find it helpful to visualize the rhyming pattern with colors and shapes. This can be done using colored objects or by drawing. Try both. Words that rhyme with each other will be represented by the same shape and color. You will find an example on the next page.

Rhyming and rhythm in *The Blueberry Machine*

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Soon Olav heard his tummy rumble.	
“I think,” he said to his dog Tumble,	
“We’d better stop and take a rest,	
A bite to eat would be the best.”	

Keep the drawn diagram in a convenient place and use it as a reminder when you do the activity “writing about your machine in verse.” This diagramming method will come in handy again.

Finding the rhythm in the lines

Questions:

Is each line of the text a full sentence? How do you know where a sentence ends? Look carefully at the punctuation. Where do you see a period? Are the sentences sometimes longer than one line?

Do you see how each line begins? Is there a pattern?

Why do you think the author divides his sentences into different lines? Is there a pattern?

When you listen to the text, would you guess that the lines are about the same length, or do some lines seem much longer than others?

Read one line at a time aloud, and ask your child to count the number of syllables in each line. Read slowly and carefully so that each syllable can be heard clearly. Your child can keep track of the syllables by counting on fingers as you read or by making a mark for each syllable on a piece of paper. Try the same line several times and see if your child gets the same answer each time. It might take a few repetitions to hear the syllables accurately. If your child is unsure about what a syllable is, you can give an example. Choose a line and show how you hear and mark off the syllables.

Rhyming and rhythm in *The Blueberry Machine*

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When your child can count off the syllables with ease, focus on one page of the book that has 4-6 lines. Read each line while the child records the syllables on a piece of paper.

Questions:

How many syllables does each line have?

Do the lines have the same number of syllables or a different number of syllables?

What happens if we add a word to one of the lines? Let's read it out loud with the extra word and see what happens to the rhythm.

Set up: The machine will be made with the child's collection of objects (see the previous activity "finding and gathering objects"). Help find a flat, hard floor area or table top for working. You will need an area of about 11×16 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 will 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? How will it be changed when it comes out?

Does your machine solve problems?

Writing about your machine in verse

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Before starting this writing activity, be sure that you have already done the activity “Rhyming and rhythm in *The Blueberry Machine*” with the child. Take a few minutes to review what the child discovered about rhyming patterns and rhythm in the earlier activity. The child should also make a machine before beginning with this writing activity.

Preparing to write

The child will brainstorm a collection of words about his or her machine. Provide some hints to help the child think about the machine from many points of view: Think about how the machine works, what it does, the sounds and motions it makes, how it looks, and how it might make someone feel. What words come to mind? Write down each word on its own small index card or piece of paper, and lay them out on the floor or table.

Brainstorming also works as a group activity or with a partner. All participants can think of words, write them down, and put them in the collection. If someone does not know a word, the person who chose the word can explain what it means and why he or she chose it. It’s most important to keep the ideas flowing and less important who writes down the words. The child can do it, or you can. Or you can take turns.

Questions:

Do any of the words rhyme? The child will put the rhyming words together in groups.

What are your favorite words in the collection? Which words express something very important about the machine?

Lay out the most important words where they can be seen easily, and work together to think of other words that rhyme with them. Encourage the child to ask others in your family or classroom to help think of words that rhyme. Write these new words down on cards, and organize the rhyming words together in groups. Even if the child does not like the words that other people contribute, it is good to hear, see, and read them. The child can choose whichever words he or she likes best.

Writing about your machine in verse

2/4

Questions:

Are you having trouble thinking of a rhyme for a very important word?

Can you think of a way to change a word to make a rhyme?

Can you make up a good word that sounds like what you want to say and rhymes in the right way?

Practicing rhyming couplets

The Blueberry Machine is written in rhyming couplets, which means that every two lines of the story rhyme. There are other ways to organize the pattern of rhyming words. The couplet is a good way to start. Look back at the diagram the child made of the rhyming pattern in the activity “rhyming and rhythm in *The Blueberry Machine*.” In the diagram, the shapes and colors that match represent a rhyming couplet.

To practice and have some fun, the child can work with a partner to think up rhyming couplets: Choose a pair of rhyming words from the collection. Each player will take one of the rhyming words. One player will make up the first line, ending with the word on his or her card. The other player will make up the second line, ending with the word on his or her card. Try this again for other pairs of rhyming words. Take turns thinking up the first line. Remember that a line does not have to be a complete sentence. One player can start an idea with the first line and let the other player finish the idea with a surprise. To keep the game going, the players can simply speak the lines out loud as they make them up. But be sure to write down the lines that are really good or funny. If this is difficult at first, just keep trying.

Writing a story in verse

The child will use the collection of words and rhyming pairs to write a story about his or her machine. The rhyming words will go at the ends of the lines.

You can help your child organize his or her thoughts by asking questions and providing hints: Which words and ideas go together? Put these words into a group.

What other words and ideas go together? Make a group of those words. Move things around and see what you like best. Not all of the words have to be used, and other words that are not part of the collection will be needed. The collection is only a source of ideas and can be used as needed.

The challenge is to write rhyming couplets. The lines should have the same number of syllables and end with a rhyme. Encourage the child to be playful and change parts of words if it will help the rhythm and rhyming.

This is a very challenging activity. The rhyming couplet game above was good practice, and it can be played again to refresh the child's memory or to help get through a moment of frustration. The game can be used to restore the child's sense of humor and get ideas flowing again.

Rhyming like a machine

Could a machine write rhyming couplets? What if there were a machine that sorted words into rhyming verse but mixed up all the meaning into complete nonsense? For this game, pair two children together. Each player will contribute a collection of words written on cards. The words of the two players will be mixed together to create one big word collection, and the players will use the words to write a nonsense story in rhyming couplets.

Spread out the words on a table or floor and put the rhyming words together in groups.

Decide how many syllables will be in a line. Not too long, but also not too short. Ten syllables is a good number. Experiment to see when you think the line is too long or too short.

Take turns choosing the pair of rhyming words that will go at the ends of the lines of the rhyming couplets.

Search through your collection to find words that have the right number of syllables to complete the lines.

Writing about your machine in verse

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The players do not have to make complete sentences or make sense! Play around and organize the words in different ways. What sounds the most interesting as a line? What's the funniest? Think about how the lines sound.

Here are some extra challenges to try out in the nonsense story:

Write lines in which all or most of the words start with the same letter. This is called alliteration. Remember that the lines of your couplets must have the right number of syllables and rhyming words at the end.

Say different letter sounds out loud and compare them. For example:

B, D, K, P, T make short sounds. They disappear almost as fast as you can say them.

A, E, F, R, S, SH, TH are long sounds that can go on and on and on.

Are there some letter sounds that are quiet and others that are loud? Can you make a SH sound as loud as a B sound?

Experiment together with different sounds and discuss what you hear.

Make a pattern with the syllables in a line. For example:

If your lines have 11 syllables, you could make a pattern of 1, 3, 3, 3, 1. Each line will have 5 words. A 1-syllable word at the beginning and end. 3 three-syllable words in the middle.

Experiment with different patterns and see what sounds best.

Discover other artists and machines

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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

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

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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

Multiple artists and inventors

Collection of 15 machine works:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7o9OL_y71W0