

PLAY IDEAS BANK

Practical Ideas for
Creative Play -
A comprehensive
collection for
Playworkers &
Playschemes
everywhere

No.11

MOBILES

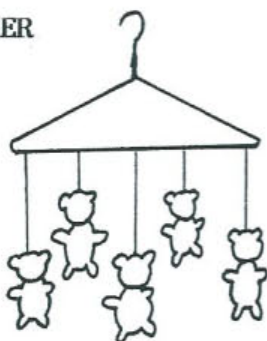


Mobiles are easy to make, and give lots of scope to children's imagination. They can be as big and as crazy as you want, as long as you've got somewhere to hang them. Children can make mobiles individually, or better still in groups, where everyone contributes a piece for the finished mobile. The combination of colour and movement always looks good in a play or community building.

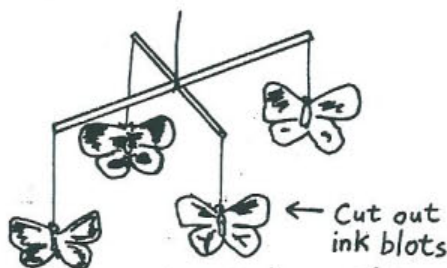
This leaflet starts with some very easy mobiles, covers basic construction and hanging techniques and ends up with some clever and unusual designs. It has been written and drawn by Harry Shier.

Let's start with some of the very simplest mobiles; ones you can easily make with pre-school children:

THE COATHANGER



Cut shapes - any shapes - from coloured card. Make a little hole in each and hang several on threads from a wire coat-hanger. That's all there is to it; With this method there's no problem with balancing the mobile or getting it to hang straight.



TWO STICKS

Tie two sticks together to make a cross (e.g. green garden sticks, but anything will do). Hang a cut-out shape from each end - and one in the middle. Adjust the position of the knot in the middle till the whole thing balances properly from a central string, then fix with a spot of glue.

Materials

If you've mastered that let's, move on. But first, a look at materials and equipment:

STICKS

Stiff wire is the ideal material; you can cut lengths from coat-hangers or buy a roll of suitable wire from a hardware shop. You'll need pliers for cutting and bending and of course this is not very easy for younger children. Stiff cane or thin dowelling are good alternatives. Green garden sticks are a good, cheap resource for play projects and many Resource Centres stock them.

STRING

Ordinary sewing thread is fine for all but the heaviest mobiles. Being very thin it doesn't spoil the effect and it lets the hanging objects move round easily. Slightly thicker string might be easier for young children to tie by themselves, though.

GLUE

Clear Bostik or similar is ideal, but PVA works fine, though it takes longer to dry.

... and what to hang from it? ...

HANGING OBJECTS

Use your imagination . . . see what you can find . . . try something different . . . but to start you thinking, here are some ideas:

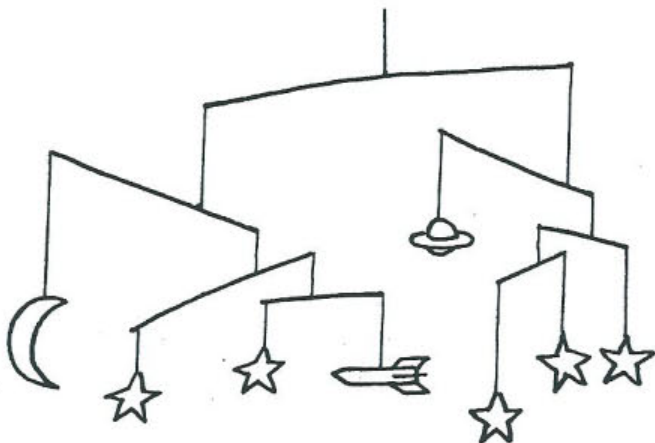
- * Cut out card shapes or pictures, painted, collaged, decorated how you want.
- * Shiny things that catch the light: use foil-covered card, apply glitter, gold paint. Pieces of mirror.
- * 3-D shapes from clay, cooked play-doh, wood, origami, cardboard, plastic, old ping-pong balls, tissue paper flowers.

- * Translucent shapes from coloured cellophane or "Dip-It" plastic film.
- * Found objects - go on a treasure hunt at your local Resource Centre. Or natural objects from the great outdoors.

Mobiles can be abstract or they can have any theme or subject you choose. Things like birds, fish and boats are particularly effective because the movement of the mobile creates an impression of flying, swimming or sailing and so seems to bring them to life. It's not an original idea, but you can always find new ways of making them.

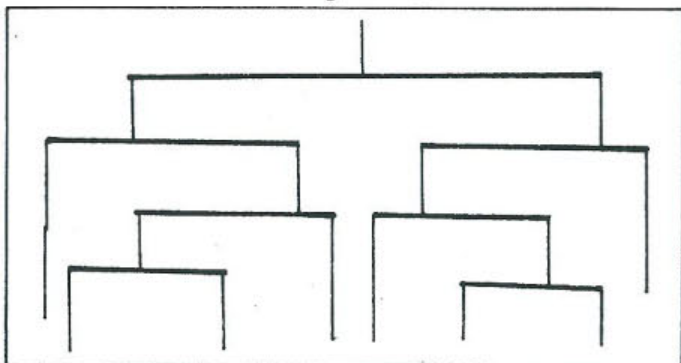
Multi-Level Mobiles

Now we'll move on to something a bit more impressive; mobiles that hang on several different levels and move in all directions at once. These are trickier as they need careful balancing, but there's an easy way to do it once you know how. Here's an example:

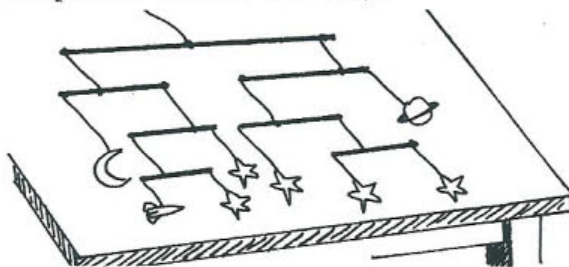


HOW TO PUT IT TOGETHER

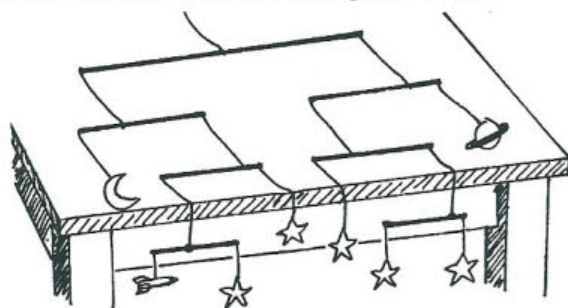
1. As a reminder, draw out a plan of your mobile on paper. We can't tell you sizes as this will depend on the pieces you want to hang. This example has eight pieces and uses seven sticks at four levels. The sticks on each level are about three-quarters as long as the one above. If you try this lay-out, you'll soon be able to adapt it for more pieces or different arrangements.



2. Cut the sticks to the lengths you need and lay out all the sticks and hanging pieces in position on a large table (The table top needs to be as high as your completed mobile will be).



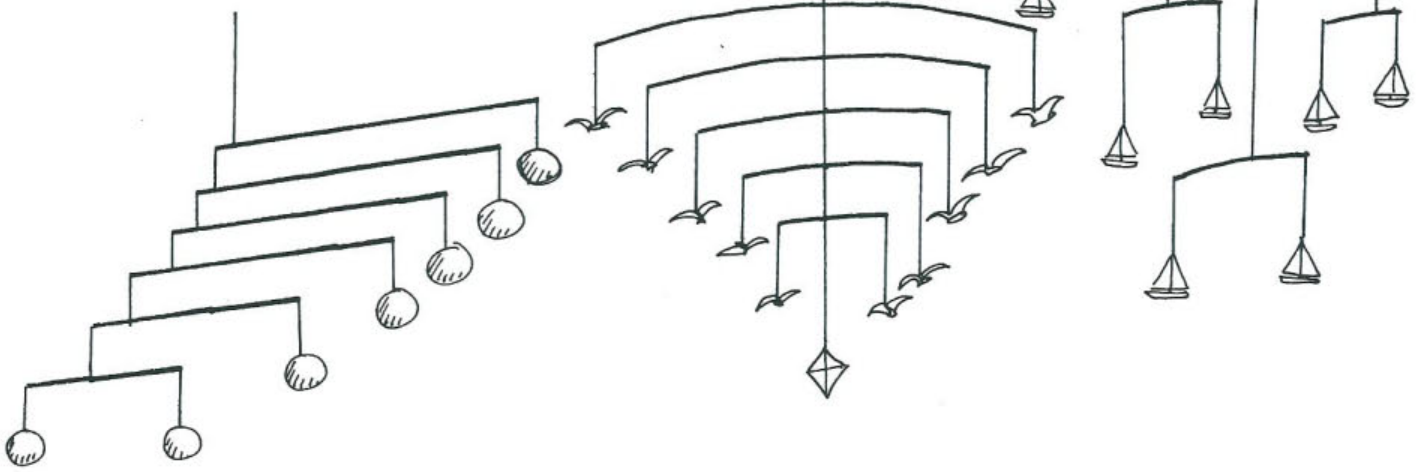
3. Tie all the pieces and sticks together with lengths of thread or string as in your pattern. Use a simple slip knot (or a clove hitch if you can do one).
4. Carefully pull the whole thing down the table so that the bottom level sticks hang over the edge. They probably won't balance. Slide the central knot till it will balance, then fix it, and the strings at the ends, in position with a spot of glue. Re-check the balance before the glue dries.



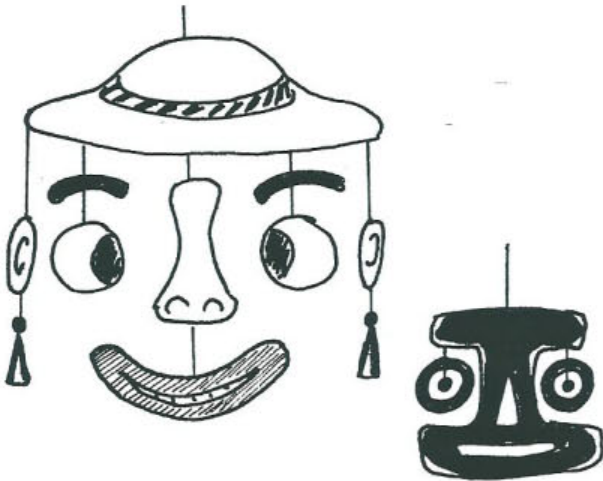
5. Now pull it down a bit more so the next stick hangs over the edge of the table. Balance and glue this one in the same way.
6. Carry on like this till you have worked your way to the top of the mobile and the whole thing balances properly.

Variations

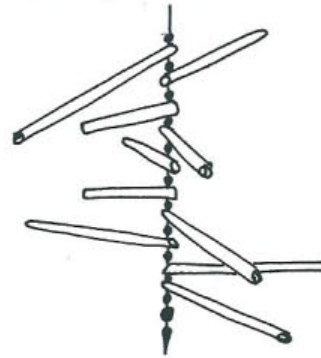
Here are some variations on the basic mobile, all made and balanced the same way. A basic principle is that the pieces shouldn't hit each other as they go round, so it keeps moving freely:



Moving face mobiles, made from cardboard.



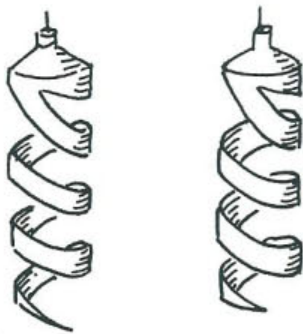
Coloured drinking straws and beads



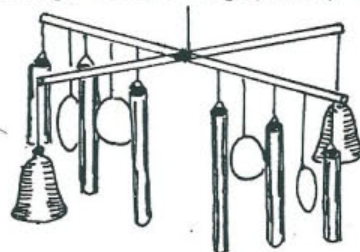
Coloured card circles plus ping-pong ball.



Spirals made from washing-up liquid bottles.



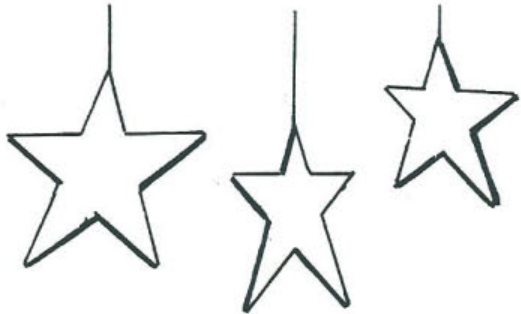
Sound mobiles: Lengths of steel tube or any found objects that make a nice sound when struck gently: Bottle tops, lids, tin cans.



AND NOW SOME MORE AMBITIOUS MOBILES:

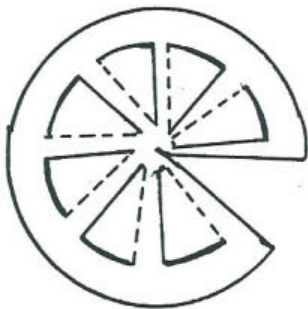
GIANT MOBILES

Giant shapes cut from corrugated cardboard and painted or decorated can be hung in a high-ceilinged hall. They look great for parties or discos and you can follow a theme for special occasions.

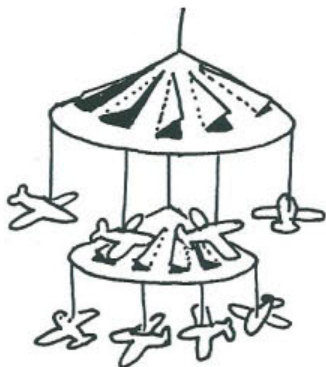


PROPELLOR-DRIVEN MOBILES.

Cut a circle of cardboard like this and score along the dotted lines:



Use it to make a mobile and hang it above a heater or where there are hot air currents. The rising air spins the mobile. It looks particularly impressive if you have two going opposite directions:



SUMMERSALTING CLOWN

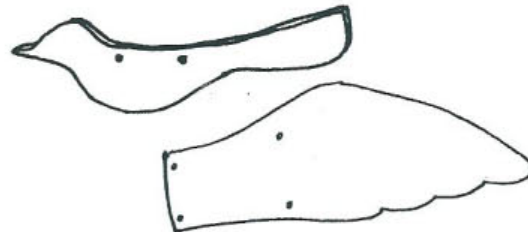
Cut a clown shape like this from plywood or thick card. The hole in the hand should be the centre of gravity, i.e. where it balances.



Glue it to a piece of dowelling and attach threads as shown. Wind it up and let go. If it's properly balanced it should keep summersalting backwards and forwards. Try a parrot or other character instead of the clown.



FLYING BIRD



Cut a body from plywood, wings from cardboard. Tie wings to body so they flap freely, then hang as shown from holes about a third along the wing. Glue weights (e.g. washers) to wing-tips till it balances level. Now when you start it moving it should continue to flap its wings slowly and realistically. Try dragons, bats, flying pigs etc.



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www.grcltd.org