

Session 5 Dyeing fabrics Practical activities

Dyeing fabric is a small-group activity. In advance of the lesson, prepare commercial dyes or natural dyes as follows for use with the children.

Commercial dyes

Follow the manufacturer's guidance and mix the dye in a bucket. Wear rubber gloves if your hands are to be in contact with the dye.

Natural dyes

Natural dyes are also successful when dyeing cotton and calico. These dyes will need to be prepared by an adult beforehand.

Onion skins (bright yellow colours), beetroot, tea and blackberries are the most successful and easily available.

Use natural dyes in the same way as commercial dyes. The colours will not be as vivid, but will have their own qualities.

Advance preparation of natural dyes

Approximate quantities: 2–3 cups of plant material to 3 pints of water.

- Add the water to the collected plant material in a pan large enough to stir without spilling.
- Heat until the colour from the plant material begins to change the colour of the water.
- Heat to almost boiling and then reduce the heat, stirring the material to release the dye. There is no need to boil the water.
- Once heated, allow to stand and cool. Then strain out the plant material leaving the dye.

Demonstration

Introduce the session to a small group of children by talking with them about the colours of clothes that they are wearing.

Show the white fabric and the dyes to the children. Use commercial dyes or natural dyes as described on this page. Wear rubber gloves.

Take a square of fabric and show the children how it absorbs the liquid as it is immersed into the bucket of dye. Remove the fabric, squeeze out excess water and place onto a drying line or rack. Place newspapers underneath the drying line or rack if drying indoors.

Tie-dye

Tie-dye involves binding fabric with string or elastic bands and then immersing the bundle into the dye bucket. This activity will involve one-to-one supervision.

Help the children to use string or elastic bands to tie the fabric. To make concentric circles, for example, pinch the material where you want the centre of the circles to be and pull the fabric to make a shape like a closed umbrella. Bind the elastic bands or string at intervals along the shape until securely in place. String must be wrapped around a few times and knotted. Make sure that this is done very tightly to prevent the dye penetrating through.

To make stripes, roll the cloth loosely to make a tube. Tie tightly at intervals along the tube. The stripes will be at right angles to the tube.

The binding needs to be tight enough to prevent the tied parts of the fabric from absorbing the dye. When the binding is removed, most of the fabric beneath the string or elastic bands will be white and the rest of the fabric will be dyed, thus creating patterns.

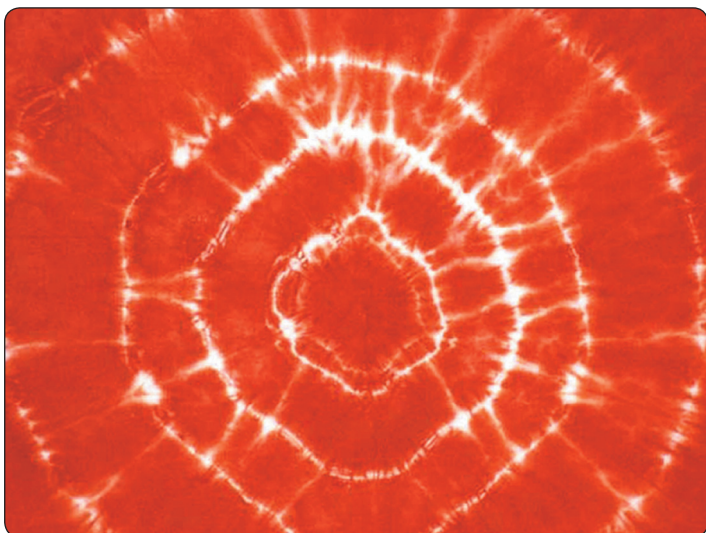
Development

Provide children with a postcard-sized piece of cotton fabric and supervise them as they immerse the fabric in the dye. Encourage them to watch as the fabric absorbs the dye and changes colour. Hang up the fabric to dry.

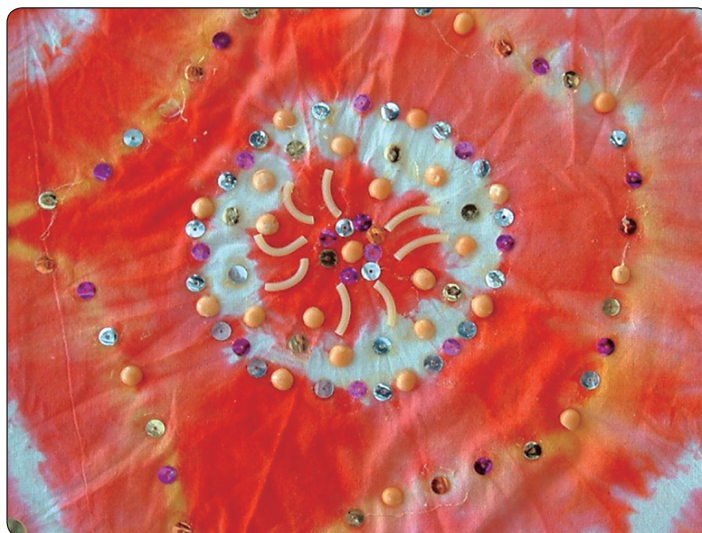
When the fabric has dried, embellishments may be added. These may include simple stitching (see Session 3) and the addition of beads, buttons or sequins.

Assessment opportunities

- Are the children able to name the colours of the dyes?
- Do they understand that the colour of fabric can be changed?
- Are they able to talk about their work?
- Have the children acquired and developed skills and knowledge?
- Have they explored different materials and observed how they react to dyes?
- Do they recognise colour and pattern in their work?
- Can they talk about their work?



Children's tie-dye panel



Children's tie-dye panel with embellishment

Evaluation

How did the activity go?

