

Volcanoes appeal to children's love of drama, power and explosions! The play volcano provides a great backdrop for many small world play scenes – not least the land of the dinosaurs. Creating your own volcanic eruption will allow conversation about the natural world to flow and build children's scientific understanding.

Magma-nificent volcanic eruption

Use this simple recipe to make your volcano erupt. You will need:

- Small bowl
- Cup
- 2 tbsp water
- ½ cup vinegar
- 1 tbsp bicarbonate of soda (baking soda)
- 1 tbsp washing-up liquid / dish soap
- few drops of red food dye

In the bowl, combine the bicarbonate of soda and washing-up liquid. Add the water and mix thoroughly. Place the volcano on a tray (to contain the lava flow!) and pour this mixture into your volcano. In the cup, mix together the vinegar and food dye.

When you're ready, pour the vinegar into the volcano. Wait for it to erupt and watch how the lava flows. You can repeat this several times until all the bicarbonate of soda has reacted.



Lava talk

Build on children's existing knowledge of volcanoes with questions and discussion:

- What does a volcano look like? (Not all volcanoes are mountains – some are long vents or domes.)
- What comes out of volcanoes?
- What is lava like? Is it hot or cold?
- What happens to lava when it cools down? (You could point out where the lava has cooled and set on the volcano.)
- How many volcanoes are there in the world? (Over 1500!)
- Are there any volcanoes in this country?
- What animals might live near a volcano – or lived near one in the past?

There are plenty of online videos showing real volcanic eruptions.

Small world, big volcano

The volcano is a great backdrop for all sorts of small world scenes. To add lava, children could build the flows with red and yellow play dough flowing out of the crater. They will be improving their fine motor skills as they build together, as well as discussing where to place each piece! Alternatively, scrunch up a couple of floaty red and yellow scarves, push them inside the top of the volcano and watch them erupt out again.





Land of the dinosaurs

- Tray with sand or pebbles in the base
- Large sticks for fallen trees
- Leafy plants – real or artificial
- Other natural materials, such as pine cones, moss or stones
- Play Volcano – and perhaps the Play Cave as well!
- Winding line of red fabric, playdough or tissue paper to create a river of lava
- Dinosaurs Wooden Characters or figures
- Dinosaur Bones, Let's Investigate Dinosaur Footprints or Prehistoric Teeth

Endangered animal habitats

- A mixed terrain with sand, large stones, and grass – real or artificial
- Rainforest leaves – real plants or artificial
- Endangered Animal Families Wooden Characters or other endangered animal figures
- Play Volcano



Underwater volcano

- Real water or blue fabric
- Pebbles, shells and Scenery Stones – Ocean Play
- Sand for the sea floor if you're using real water
- Little Lands – Ocean characters or other sea creature figures
- Play Volcano and Play Cave for under the water

Frozen volcano

- Real ice or blue and white fabrics
- Scenery Stones – Polar Play, cloud dough or cotton wool
- Arctic animal figures or Little Lands – Polar characters
- Play Igloo
- Play volcano – it may be icy but watch out, it can still erupt!

An eruption of creativity

Talking about volcanoes can lead to various art activities:

- Cut out triangles from black paper, stick them down, then add blobs of red and yellow paint (with a small amount of water added to them) - blowing the paint with a straw will make the lava fly!
- Make a large cone from black paper, then add red and yellow tissue paper for lava.

To take the fun outside, arrange mats and objects in your outdoor area and play, 'The floor is lava!'



Books about volcanoes

A Trip to the Top of the Volcano with Mouse by Frank Viva

Going to the Volcano by Andy Stanton

Vladimir the Volcano by Raba Boulos

Planet Earth (First Facts and Flaps) by Campbell Books

Get talking – useful words

Erupt/eruption, lava, magma, crater, vent, flow, hot, set, cold, liquid, solid, rock, smoke