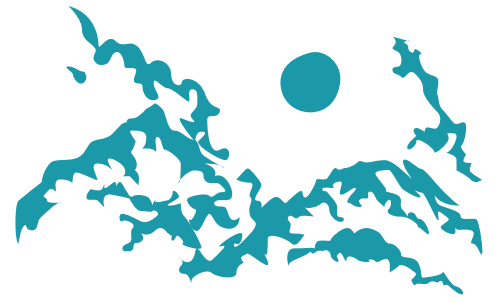


# Bonseki Salt Painting



## Activity Description

Bonseki is a traditional Japanese artform for depicting landscapes that can be traced back as far as the 7th century CE. It translates literally to “tray rocks” (盆石), referring to the medium the artist uses to depict their landscape. Rather than use pencil, ink, or paint, Bonseki artists arrange sand and rocks on a black tray to form the lines and shapes of their picture.

In many ways, artists and scientists use the same skills: observing the world around them and testing different methods for sharing that world. Creating a Bonseki masterpiece is an exercise in tinkering (trying out different methods and materials without worrying too much about the end goal) and a great way to connect with nature. Bonseki takes a lot of practice and patience to create something very fragile and temporary! The value is in the creation process, rather than

just the outcome.

If you have access to dirt and sand that would show up in a dark background, feel free to use it with an adult’s permission. Traditionally, Bonseki artists use fine white sand, which we can imitate with a common household item: table salt!

## Materials

Table Salt

Black or dark-colored paper/ dark-colored flat surface

Miscellaneous handheld texturing objects (eg. feather, comb, fork, paintbrush...)

An image of nature to use as a reference (from a book, from the internet, from your surroundings...)

Miscellaneous rocks (optional)

## Preparation and Safety

Ask an adult for help if you want to use something sharp as a texturing object.

# bitesizeactivities

## Procedure

1. Clear a space where you can spread out and experiment without getting salt all over your stuff. If you can do this activity outside, that's even better!
2. Gather some objects you can use to move and spread the salt to make your image. This can be anything you can comfortably hold in your hand that you think might make an interesting pattern. Painters use a paintbrush to apply their medium; you could use a paintbrush, a stick, a blade of grass, a comb, or any number of things to make different lines and shapes.
3. Find an image of nature to reference in your Bonseki landscape. If we are both artists and scientists, we should observe our world closely and try to represent how it really looks, rather than just how we think it looks. Not every piece of art has to look exactly like a photograph, but it can be a fun challenge to try to create exactly what your eyes see. Your reference image can be a picture of a mountain or a river from a book, magazine, or the internet. It could also be a natural feature you see right in front of you, like trees, flowers, or clouds.
4. After gathering your materials and reference image, sprinkle a pinch (or a handful) of salt onto your dark surface. The salt will make up the lines and shapes of your picture, but first you have to shape it.
5. Experiment with different texturing objects to see the lines and shapes they create in the salt. If you run a four-tined fork through a sprinkling of salt, it will create four parallel lines an even distance apart. If you squiggle your fork through the salt, does it leave a pattern that looks a little like swirling water? What if you use a feather to gently sweep the salt in one direction. Does it look like a gentle mist or a fluffy cloud? Tinker with different objects to see how many different kinds of marks you can make.
6. Once you are more familiar with your texturing objects, take a look at your reference image again. What patterns, shapes and lines do you see? What tools could you use to mimic those in your Bonseki landscape?
7. Recreate your reference image in salt using your different tools. Be patient with yourself and stick with it, but also don't be afraid to sweep parts of your artwork away and start again if you need to.
8. If you want, you can add rocks to your Bonseki landscape for an extra 3D element.
9. When you like what you have created, ask an adult's help to take a picture of it! Bonseki art is not meant to last forever; it's just salt sprinkled on a surface! That salt

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## Procedure (continued)

can be easily brushed away to make something else, but you will always have a picture of your work.

10. Once you have documented your awesome work, brush the salt away and start again using another reference image!

## Extensions or Adaptations

- You can add different materials, like various colors of soil, or even beads or glitter to add texture and color to your Bonseki landscape.
- Try randomly sprinkling, scooping, or sweeping salt onto your surface and create an image from the various shapes and patterns. Sometimes the best artwork happens by “accident!”