



Craft a Craft

Whittling is a type of carving done by using a small knife to make small cuts in a piece of wood to shape it into something else. In the book *Paddle-to-the-Sea*, a young Indian boy whittles a piece of pine into a model canoe and figure that travels thousands of miles.

Small, sharp knives are not common toys for young boys or girls in this day and age. But in this activity your child can still have the experience and satisfaction of crafting a sea-worthy craft from wood.

Supplies

- lengths of straight, dry (seasoned) sticks (12 to 20 sticks)
- yarn or string
- cutting tool (for evening the lengths of sticks and cutting string)

Getting Started

To build a natural boat from wood, head out into nature! Gather straight, dry sticks that can lie together to form a raft. You can even build your craft outside if you bring a cutting tool and string with you. You may even want to plan to do this if where you gather your wood there's also an accessible body of water for boat testing and launching.

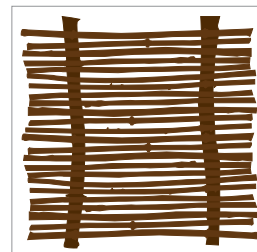
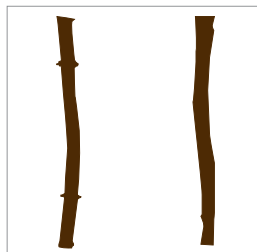
As you gather sticks, talk about the fiction title you read. Ask your child what kind of adventure he'd like to have on the water. Think aloud together about things besides travel and recreation that we depend on rivers for, such as drinking water, animal habitats, and even electricity.

Also talk with him about how the size of his raft depends on the size of his sticks. Sticks that are 10 to 12 inches long may be easiest to work with. Help him estimate stick length with a known standard, such as a dollar bill (6.14 inches). Also most of your sticks should have a similar diameter — what determines how big around they are — though choose two that have a diameter at least twice that of all the others.

Lining Things Up

Once you have your sticks, lay them side-by-side. If the sticks are small and quite dry, your child may be able to break off ends to bring them all to a similar length. Otherwise, you should use a cutting tool to even them out for him. Then take your two sticks with the larger diameter and place them parallel to each other, less than one stick length apart. Lay your other sticks perpendicular to the parallel sticks, letting them overlap the larger sticks about an inch. Gather more sticks if needed or trim your parallel sticks down to size.

Help your child knot a long piece of string around one end around the end of the first perpendicular stick. Wind the string under and around the parallel stick so that the sticks are secured together. Continue winding additional sticks until all your sticks are secure. The sticks you've laid out won't stay in place until they are tied; so



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reassure your child that it is okay if the original layout is not maintained while tying takes place. Repeat tying stick lengths to the other parallel stick. Try to pull the sticks tightly together as you wind the string around.

Time now to test the waters! If your child wants to keep his raft, make sure you are testing in water that allows you to safely and easily retrieve the craft. Otherwise, make note of water currents, see if your child can make a prediction about where his boat will float, and wish it *bon voyage*!

Variation: Indoor rafting. Rafts can also be built from Lincoln Logs® or Popsicle® sticks and launched in the bathtub or sink.

After you've finished reading the books together and taken your homemade raft out on the water, you might enjoy watching this 30 minute film adaptation of *Paddle-to-the-Sea*: http://www.nfb.ca/film/paddle_to_the_sea/